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ABSTRACT

The need for an adequate financial base for the future of quality early care and education (ECE) for young children is being increasingly recognized. This document compiles four papers commissioned to frame the discussion at a 1999 working meeting of individuals from diverse fields to identify and explore possible actions related to financing ECE for children birth through 5 years of age. The papers are: (1) "Toward Solutions: Through the Child Care Funding Maze" (Louise Stoney), describes how ECE is financed in the United States and offers examples and new and innovating ways that states and communities have generated funds for ECE services; (2) "Winning Early Care and Education Funding: Successful Strategies from Five States" (Nancy Sconyers), describes funding strategies in Florida, California, Oklahoma, New York, and Illinois; (3) "Funding Early Care and Education: An Assessment of Public Support" (Ethel Klein), examines public opinion regarding the benefits and drawbacks of early care and education for children and working parents and its role in connecting with the workforce; and (4) "Creating a Climate for Change" (Deborah Wadsworth), concerns Americans' attitudes toward children, child care, and parent responsibility. Each paper contains references. (KB)

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Stepping Up

Financing Early Care and Education in the 21st Century

Volume I

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Four Papers Commissioned for

MAKING IT ECONOMICALLY VIABLE: FINANCING EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

A Working Meeting · Santa Cruz, California · March 3-5, 1999

June 1999

Dear Colleague,

The David and Lucile Packard and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundations joined together in early March of this year to sponsor a working meeting, *Making It Economically Viable: Financing Early Care and Education,* in Santa Cruz. Fifty economists, children's advocates, academic experts, and public policy specialists met with a goal of formulating viable financing strategies over the next decade for an early care and education (ECE) system.

You will be hearing more as we progress. In the meantime, in an effort to capture the spirit of the discussions that occurred during the Santa Cruz meeting, we have put together a two-volume series entitled ***Stepping Up: Financing Early Care and Education in the 21st Century.*** We are sending you this collection (the first volume of the series) of four framing papers that were commissioned by our two foundations in preparation for the meeting. These papers are being shared because they bring forward new insights about the challenges and opportunities associated with instituting new financing strategies on behalf of ECE. For those of you who attended, they will remind you of the discussions that occurred, the ideas debated, and next steps to be considered. Our intent is to provide an overview of the changes currently facing the ECE field, an analysis of public attitudes towards children and programs that support children, and funding strategies successfully used today by advocates.

We will send you in the near future a summary of the proceedings of the conference as the companion volume to this publication. In the meantime, we will be in touch with many of you to follow up on commitments made during our discussions.

It's clear from the enthusiasm displayed and the ideas generated at the meeting that the ECE field is ready to take action on financing issues. We hope this material will provoke new thinking and intensified dialogue so that we can step up to the challenges facing us as we create financing strategies to strengthen families and our ECE system in the next century. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to this important work.

Sincerely,

Stacie G. Goffin
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EWING MARION KAUFFMAN FOUNDATION

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Stepping Up

Financing Early Care and Education in the 21st Century

Volume I

Four Papers Commissioned for

MAKING IT ECONOMICALLY VIABLE: FINANCING EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

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Toward Solutions: *Through the Child Care Funding Maze*

BY Louise Stoney

Most Americans agree that caring for children is of paramount importance. Yet the United States has never been able to shape a cohesive, effective system of early care and education (ECE). Our policies are clouded by ambivalence about the role of the family, the appropriateness of out-of-home care, and the level of responsibility government should assume. Some argue that the care and education of very young children is a private matter, to be addressed within the family. Others point to the growing numbers of working families in need of preschool care as well as the vital importance of brain development in the early years, and stress the need for a publically supported system of ECE programs and services.

Families have changed dramatically in recent years. More mothers are working outside the home. Single-parent families are increasing in number. Many parents live apart from extended family and friends. Welfare reform initiatives are requiring women with very young children to accept jobs or attend job training programs. In 1940, 87% of children under the age of six had a non-employed parent who could provide full-time care. By 1989, only 48% of these young children had a parent at home full-time.[1] And 2.7 million – one out of every three – preschool-age children whose mothers are *not* in the labor force use some form of ECE service on a regular basis.[2]

Response has come in fits and starts. While government has failed to clarify its role, parents have sought solutions. The result has been a hodge podge of small, independently run child care centers; part-day nursery schools housed in churches, synagogues, and community centers; and home-based child care programs started by entrepreneurs as well as informal care provided by friends and neighbors who see themselves more as an extension of the family. These programs coexist with large corporate child care chains, publically funded Head Start and prekindergarten programs, after-school programs for older children, and private employment services that recruit nannies and au pairs for the more affluent.

This paper briefly describes how ECE is financed in the United States, and offers examples of new and innovative ways that states and communities have generated funds for early childhood services.[3] Several key lessons that ECE leaders might learn from public policy in other fields – such as housing,

health care, higher education, and transportation – are then used to frame potential action steps, which are outlined in the paper's conclusion.

Federal Investment

Government support for ECE services is fragmented, inconsistent, and largely limited to low-income families. The two largest federal programs are: 1) Head Start, which was originally designed to provide part-day child development services to children and families with incomes at or below the poverty level, and 2) the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which is linked to welfare reform and allocated to states to help poor families pay for child care (although a small portion of CCDF funds may be used to improve the quality of ECE services for all families). While both of these initiatives are administered by the federal Department of Health and Human Services, they are run by separate bureaus and embody different, and at times opposing, philosophies.

The *CCDF* is a block grant. States are given fairly broad latitude in determining how to expend the funds, although they must comply with federal guidelines that require parental choice, limit subsidies to low-income families, and encourage some quality improvement efforts as well as minimum health and safety standards. The bulk of CCDF funds are administered by states as *portable subsidies* (such as vouchers or purchase of service agreements) that follow the child to whatever ECE program is selected by the family.

Head Start, on the other hand, is a *direct subsidy* administered by the federal government to community-based grantees. These funds are typically not portable, and programs that receive Head Start funds must comply with federal performance standards and are monitored by staff from federal regional offices.

The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, which provides a small tax break to families that incur child care expenses, is the third largest source of federal support. Although the credit may, in theory, be claimed by taxpayers at all income levels, the benefit is very small. The maximum credit for families with two children in care and an annual income of over $28,000 is only $960 – very little when one considers that this family could easily spend more than $12,000 a year on ECE.[4] Because it is not refundable, the credit offers no assistance to families with very low incomes and no tax liability.

Largest Federal Funding Streams for Early Care and Education

Head Start	**$4 billion**
CCDF	**$2.8 billion**
Child & Dependent Care Tax Credit	**$2.5 billion**
Child & Adult Care Food Program	**$1.6 billion**

(CDCTC data is a 1996 estimate from IRS web page, all other data is for FFY 1997 and obtained from the 1998 Green Book.)

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is the fourth largest federal child care subsidy. These funds are designed to cover the cost of meals, snacks and nutrition education in ECE programs that serve children from low-income families. CACFP is a *direct subsidy*; these funds are typically administered by state departments of education or health, and awarded to ECE programs as a monthly cost reimbursement.

State Investments

States play a key role in financing ECE. To receive federal CCDF funds states are required to maintain prior funding levels and match a portion of the federal allocation. States are also permitted to use welfare funds (from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF, program) to help low-income families pay for child care. Some states have transferred significant sums from TANF to child care; a few have used funds saved from the declining welfare caseloads to expand their child care subsidy systems. A number of states also allocate state general revenues to help working poor families pay for child care. All of these allocations are typically administered as *portable subsidies*, in tandem with federal CCDF funds.

States are also heavily involved in financing prekindergarten programs that primarily serve four year-old children. Between 1992 and 1998, state investments in these programs grew by 233%. Early prekindergarten initiatives were part-day programs, located in public schools, and aimed at "educationally at risk, disadvantaged" four-year olds. But in more recent years, states have begun to develop programs that are more responsive to family needs, offering longer hours and year-round services and allowing community-based ECE programs to provide the services. Some states provide funds to expand or augment the federal Head Start program, rather than funding a separate prekindergarten initiative. State prekindergarten funds, like Head Start, are almost always administered as *direct subsidies*.

The willingness among states to award prekindergarten dollars to community-based programs, rather that limiting funds to the public schools, is part of a growing trend. More and more ECE programs are blending funds from various state and federal programs–child care subsidies, Head Start, prekindergarten, and others–to create flexible, full and part-day programs that meet the needs of children and families. Policy makers are increasingly recognizing that public funds need to be permitted to flow to a variety of agencies. Unfortunately, the various government agencies that administer these funds often have different program, fiscal, and monitoring requirements. ECE programs that blend financing often jump through complex hoops to maintain balanced funding and prove to multiple funders that they are not "double dipping."

Example of State Investments

States help to fund the early care and education system in numerous ways. Many states, including Florida, Indiana, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin, to name a few, have transferred TANF funds to child care. Others have made state general revenue funds available to expand their child care subsidy systems. For example, California recently appropriated $138 million in state funds for child care, Illinois increased state child care spending by $100 million, and Minnesota approved a $99 million increase over a two year period. Some states elect to support special early childhood initiatives, such as Hawaii's "A+" universal after-school child care program and North Carolina's Smart Start initiative. State investments in prekindergarten programs have also grown dramatically in recent years. Georgia currently spends over $211 million for its universal prekindergarten program, Florida allocated $97 million, Connecticut spent almost $55 million for its program in FY99, and New York is expected to spend $500 million on its universal program by the year 2003. Additionally, quite a few states allocate funds to supplement the federal Head Start program, including Ohio, Oregon, Maine, Massachusetts, Washington and many others.

States have also established tax credits that build on the federal Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC). Unfortunately, many of these initiatives simply replicate the inequities of the CDCTC and offer parents little more than a token tax reduction. But a few states have substantially revised the approach. Minnesota, for example, allows low-income taxpayers to claim 100% of the federal credit (which doubles the benefit) or to claim the state credit if they stay home with their own newborn child.

Local Government Investments

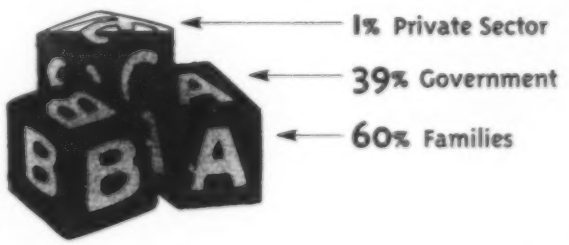
While limited information is available on the extent to which local governments help to finance ECE, they clearly play an important role. Local school districts sometimes help to pay for school-based prekindergarten and school-aged child care programs or make free space available to house these services. Municipal governments sometimes allocate local tax levy funds, or direct flexible federal funds (such as those from the Community Development Block Grant) to child care initiatives. Florida has established special taxing districts which allow local governments to raise revenues for children's services. Several counties, such as Hillsborough and Palm Beach, have used this approach to raise funds for ECE services. Washington State established a Families and Education Levy which earmarks a portion of local property taxes for children's services. San Francisco has a similar tax levy, called "Proposition J."[6] Aspen, Colorado and Ames, Iowa have established local sales tax levies to generate funds for children's services. Austin, Texas has a unique property tax abatement that includes a set-aside for child care.

Public-Private Partnerships

Policy makers and early childhood leaders agree that funding will need to come from many arenas: all levels of government, employers, private philanthropy, as well as families. Currently, however, the contributions of these groups are very uneven. Families carry the primary financial responsibility. As shown in the chart below, almost 60% of all funds spent for ECE services are contributed by parents. Federal, state, and local government combined contribute about 39%. And the private sector (business and philanthropy) contributes less than 1%.[8]

Many states and communities have developed initiatives to expand private sector participation in financing ECE. Increasingly, however, early childhood leaders and policy makers are realizing that these efforts are most effective when they are part of a broad, community-based approach where public and private funds can leverage and build on one another.

Major Revenue Sources for ECE



Smart Start, launched in 1993, is an excellent example. Smart Start aims to help all North Carolina children enter school healthy and ready to learn by giving communities the flexible funds and autonomy they need to develop their own unique solutions. A cornerstone of the initiative is the North

Carolina Partnership for Children, a private, non-profit entity that oversees local *Smart Start* initiatives and raises matching funds from the private sector. Quite a few other states have developed similar initiatives, although *Smart Start* is still the largest.

Florida recently developed a statewide strategy to leverage private sector financing for ECE, called the Child Care Executive Partnership Board. A small group of corporate leaders provides guidance to the initiative, which makes matching public funds available to employers who help subsidize the cost of child care for the low-income parents they employ.

In a few communities the business and philanthropic sectors have developed bold new initiatives to completely overhaul and expand the local ECE system and are hoping that these efforts will leverage new funds and approaches in the public sector. Leaders in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania have committed to raising $59 million to expand the scope and quality of ECE services in 80 low-income neighborhoods. A coalition of business, philanthropic, religious, and political leaders in Denver, Colorado (and some surrounding counties) came together to create a universal ECE system called *Educare*. In San Francisco, the Miriam and Peter Haas Fund spearheaded an effort to support four "model" child care centers. And the Marin Community Foundation endowed a child care scholarship fund the assist low- and moderate-income families in that California community.

Because of their ability to bargain with many employers, unions can be helpful partners in promoting private sector investments in ECE. In New York City, Local 1199 of the National Health and Human Services Employees Union raises almost $8 million a year from 147 employers. These funds are pooled, and used to support a wide range of ECE services for members of this union.

Next Steps

The fragmentation and inconsistencies among child care and early education funding streams have made it difficult to build or finance a comprehensive system of services. Many policy makers and early childhood leaders have, however, given careful thought to how existing ECE financing mechanisms might be expanded or linked. In some states and communities these efforts have generated additional funds for ECE services and helped to create more coordinated delivery systems. But establishing a universal, high quality ECE system will require an even greater increase in funds. (Some experts have suggested that the current funding level may need to at least triple in order to achieve this goal.)

Generating the additional funds necessary to move toward a more universal system will also require new financing strategies; strategies that may not fit our traditional ways of thinking. Many important lessons can be learned by looking outside the ECE system, at fields such as housing, health care, higher education, transportation, and others. A few of the key themes that emerge from a cross-systems exploration are discussed in more detail below.

Reevaluate Tax Policy:

Establish tax benefits that are large enough to affect consumer behavior, reach all taxpayers, and strategically crafted to promote quality in ECE.

Current ECE tax policies do not have a significant impact on consumer behavior, do not generate the level of funding needed by the ECE system, and do not reach all taxpayers. An examination of other fields suggests that it is possible to craft tax policies that achieve these goals. The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit has generated over $12 billion in private investment in housing for low- and moderate-income

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families. The home mortgage tax deduction can lower mortgage payments by as much as 30% and, not surprisingly, has a profound impact on consumer behavior. These initiatives both include strategies to ensure that the housing is maintained in good repair. New higher education tax credits offer benefits to families that are substantially higher than those available from the CDCTC.

Employer-related tax and insurance benefits offer some interesting models as well. The partial wage replacement that is available under Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) can, for example, be a very effective strategy for supporting parental leave, and one that allows the cost to be shared by employers and employees. In New Jersey, the cost of TDI for an employee with an annual income of at least $18,000 is only $90 per year. Yet the potential benefit is over $8,000 (for 26 weeks of wage replacement). States that have established mandatory plans have found that the plans remain solvent and do not cause a significant economic strain on employers.

8

Reevaluate Program Administration:

Create strategies that allow programs to easily combine portable and direct subsidies. Make direct subsidies available to lower the cost and improve the quality of ECE for all families, not just those with low-incomes.

Most fields assume that portable and direct subsidies are meant to be used in tandem. Colleges and universities, for example, receive direct subsidies from government and philanthropy which are used to lower tuition for all families, regardless of income. In addition, students may apply for scholarships and loans (portable subsidies) to help cover the cost of tuition. Institutions of higher education cover their costs by combining direct and portable subsidies. Similarly, housing developers can receive funding from the sale of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (direct subsidy) to build housing that can be rented at below market costs. In addition, low-income families may apply for Section 8 vouchers (portable subsidies) to help pay their rent in housing built with tax credit dollars. Direct aid in the transportation industry is also available to keep the fares low for all consumers. On average, transit agencies recover only about 30% of their revenues from fares.

In the ECE field, however, direct financial assistance is typically awarded *in lieu of* portable aid. Full-day, year-round ECE programs that receive direct Head Start and/or prekindergarten subsidies as well as child care vouchers must carefully document that they are not "double dipping" and government policies often make it difficult for programs to combine these funds. And almost *all* government subsidies to ECE programs are limited to low-income families. Middle and moderate income families, as well as low-income families who are on a subsidy waiting list, are expected to cover the entire cost themselves.

Reevaluate Business Practices:

Develop new alliances among ECE practitioners that allow programs to reach economies of scale, merge costly administrative functions, and negotiate with potential funders and clients as a group.

ECE programs – unlike their counterparts in other industries – tend to be very small. (The average child care center, for example, serves approximately 70 children.) Providing direct support to many small practitioners can be a challenge. Additionally, very small businesses often do not have the financial stability and fiscal expertise necessary to take advantage of many financing strategies. Colleges and

universities, on the other hand, have campuses that serve up to 50,000 students. They can afford to support a financial aid office with professional staff that focus exclusively on helping students access assistance and a development office that helps to raise additional funds to support the institution. Housing projects are built for hundreds of families, and the organizations that help to finance these projects typically "package" multiple projects into a single financing strategy to help reach economies of scale. These organizations employ a host of professionals that focus exclusively on financing. Transportation systems are equally large and employ experts in development and fiscal management. While health care began as a cottage industry made up of individual physicians in private practice, managed care is rapidly changing the face of the industry. A number of new alliances and joint ventures have been developed to help practitioners reach economies of scale, merge costly administrative functions, and negotiate with potential clients as a group. These approaches offer important lessons to the ECE field.

There are a number of ways that ECE programs can join forces and obtain economies of scale without merging. In the private sector, more and more companies are coming to realize that the future may lie in plotting common approaches to customers through relational databases and new alliances rather than plotting new strategies to compete. This is precisely what is happening to the health care industry as managed care becomes the norm. As more and more states begin to explore managed care models for the administration of child welfare funds, human service agencies have begun to explore new alliances as well. An interesting model for these alliances is one that was developed by American Airlines many years ago–the SABRE electronic reservation system which is now used by thousands of travel agencies as well as many other airline carriers. Banks have now built on this concept with ATM networks. Hotels have developed jointly owned hotel reservation systems. Other large and small businesses have used similar strategies to develop new kinds of information, management, and marketing partnerships. Through these kinds of partnerships, diverse companies can participate in joint marketing programs and gain access to new customers, sell excess capacity to other companies, take advantage of new purchasing opportunities, and develop products or services that are simply too expensive for one company alone. In short, these kinds of partnerships can make small businesses look, act, and feel big.

Imagine, for instance, if all child care programs in a region employed a single entity to market their services, enroll families, and manage billing and fee collection. This would not only expand access to new markets and streamline administrative costs, but could also help to reduce accounts receivable (which can be very high in some centers) and improve cash flow. Similarly, a group of ECE programs could come together to develop common systems for training and recruiting staff, securing substitutes, or providing a range of family support services. Perhaps certain staff positions could be shared. Or maybe programs join forces to develop a community-wide strategy for financing ECE services. The federal Higher Education Act included a small grant program designed to "seed" a community-based scholarship program. A similar approach could be tried in ECE, using government funds to help build an endowment and pulling together a consortium of local ECE providers to support development costs and share revenues. The possibilities are numerous.

It is time for ECE leaders to broaden their reach and begin to exchange ideas and strategies with leaders from other fields. And it is time that all of us challenged our nation to think broadly

and move boldly. We must a establish a strong and comprehensive ECE system; a system that is flexible enough to meet the diverse needs of children and families; a system that embraces all forms of ECE – home-based as well as center-based, care provided by professionals and care provided by family members and friends. Many of the elements are already in place. There is much all of us can do to pave the way for creative change.

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ENDNOTES

1. Hernandez, D. Changing Demographics: Past and Future Demands for Early Childhood Programs. The Future of Children (1995) 5,3. pg 146.
2. National Center for Education Statistics, ECE Program Participation for Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers (Washington, DC: NCES, October 1996).
3. This paper focuses primarily on financing ECE for children five years of age and younger. Some, but not all, of the funds described are available to support school-age child care. But funding sources specifically targeted to out-of-school-time care and activities are not fully discussed.
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2

Winning Early Care and Education Funding: *Successful Strategies From Five States*

BY Nancy Sconyers

States have increasing influence in determining the shape of ECE[1] policy. While the federal government's fiscal investment in ECE dwarfs that of the states, devolution demands that advocacy efforts for more funds now focus on the fifty states. Successful state-level advocacy for increased ECE funding is a relatively new phenomenon. State-level strategies are just beginning to emerge, so a look at case studies provides us with important opportunities for learning. This paper will discuss advocacy efforts in five states that attempted to increase funding for ECE programs, identifying those strategies which advocates[2] have found to be successful. It represents the preliminary stage of a larger project to assess state child advocacy strategies in ECE.

The five states discussed in this paper were selected both because of their accomplishments during the last few years and because they represent divergent approaches to winning funding. Although successful advocacy must employ a variety of strategies, individual strategies will be singled out for examination. In Florida and California, bringing in new influential advocacy partners helped pave the way for increased investments. In Illinois, skillful coordination between advocates inside and outside state government was a successful strategy. In Oklahoma, great strides were made by state agency staff, supported by the work of the advocacy community. Finally, although the adoption of the universal prekindergarten program in New York was spearheaded by one elected official, the successful implementation of the program was accomplished through the hard work of advocates across the state.

In examining these five states, four strategic themes emerged. First, strategically created and carefully sustained relationships enhanced power. Second, the pre-existing advocacy infrastructure provided a foundation on which to build campaigns to increase funding. Third, effective messages which targeted decision makers were employed. Fourth, advocates were pragmatic and took advantage of political opportunities that they thought had good potential.

In these five case studies, advocates successfully increased ECE funding, but unfortunately they are still the exception. Many more successes will be needed if states are going to become true partners with the federal government in funding quality ECE systems.

Bringing in Business: Florida

Although education and social services have not historically been well funded in Florida, ECE funding has fared relatively well. Until recently, the advocacy community had been fairly successful in securing funding through highlighting the length of waiting lists to dramatize the needs of low-income working families for child care subsidies. However, in spite of steady successes, progress was still too slow. Most of the child care subsidy funding was supporting families on or transitioning off welfare; too many working families overburdened by child care costs were not able to get the subsidy help they needed.

The Florida legislature acted before the federal government to pass its own state welfare reform legislation in May 1996. Welfare reform debates in Florida occurred within the context of ongoing statewide efforts by the advocacy community to improve child care subsidy policies and increase the profile of the business community on ECE issues. This juxtaposition was advantageous in both instances: policies were improved and business leaders have become champions on ECE issues.

As a result of Florida's welfare reform legislation, the Child Care Executive Partnership Board was created. The Board consists of corporate leaders and is staffed by advocates. One of the Board's goals is to educate and motivate the business community to provide leadership on ECE issues, including increasing funding. In 1998, the Board successfully advocated for a $74 million increase for child care subsidies for working poor families for FY1998-99. In addition, the Board was encouraged to recommend policies that would persuade the business community to contribute to child care subsidies for their employees. In the end, the Board won approval of its plan that mandated that state funds match employers' contributions, dollar for dollar. Thirty-six businesses, large and small, as well as individuals and foundations, have contributed more than $11 million in private and local matching funds. As a result, 7,000 additional children of working parents are being served by the child care subsidy program in Florida.

In assessing reasons for success, Florida advocates point to building strategic relationships over time, especially with the business community. Advocates targeted particular business leaders based on research showing which segments of the labor market are most dependent on workers using child care subsidies. These employers can be the strongest advocates because they best appreciate the role subsidies play for working families. Business leadership has been a boon to ECE advocacy largely because business has credibility when connecting child care subsidies and work, which is a powerful link for elected officials. Moreover, many business leaders have wide networks which include powerful individuals in many sectors. Those connections enhance their influence with state leaders.

In addition to business leaders, state agency staff have also become valuable and important allies. Not only can they be advocates for their own programs, but they are also a great source of information. They are heavily relied on by elected officials, partly because they stay in place longer, making them key actors in policy development. Florida advocates have learned a great deal about the state budget process through working with state agency staff, which has made the staff more effective voices for increased funding.

A second factor contributing to success was that Florida's resource and referral system and subsidy programs have been merged for twenty-five years, resulting in a generally well-

coordinated child care system. Parents can get assistance both in finding good child care and in applying for the subsidy program at the same site. This not only benefits parents, but it also benefits advocates. Resource and referral staff have the opportunity to learn firsthand about the important role subsidies play in low-income families' access to child care and can better understand the consequences of not having subsidies. At the same time, they can get data on the availability and cost of child care. Thus, the advocates have access to rich quantitative and qualitative information to help them build a strong case for the needs of low-income families. In addition, with the encouragement and support of the resource and referral staff, parents can become advocates for the kind of child care system that will best meet their families' needs.

Coordinating Advocacy Efforts Inside and Outside Government: Illinois

Illinois advocates also took advantage of the state's welfare reform debate to put the spotlight on child care. In addition to this strategy, there was an unusual degree of cooperation between advocates inside and outside state government. Advocates also educated decision makers about the necessity for affordable, quality child care for low-income families. The Illinois child care subsidy program has seen substantial increases in funding as a result.

As welfare reform gained momentum in Congress, a coalition of advocates and providers wrote *Thriving Children, Striving Families*. The report, widely disseminated throughout the state, strongly advocated for a universal child care subsidy system in which eligibility would be based on family income, not welfare status, and reimbursement rates increased to allow families access to better quality care. While the report was being prepared, advocates were meeting with top officials in the state administration to coordinate their support from the inside.

After the passage of the federal welfare bill, Illinois advocates began to stress the link between work and child care. In their arguments, they stressed that low-income working families should have the same access to child care as families on or transitioning off welfare. They promoted universal child care—child care subsidies for *all* low-income working families—along with higher reimbursement rates to improve access.

In order to prepare for the implementation of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in Illinois, the state welfare agency created committees to focus on three aspects of child care services: eligibility, quality and administration. In response, the coalition created three technical assistance papers, one on each committee's focus, promoting the concept of universal access to child care subsidies.

The eligibility committee determined that with available funds, eligibility levels could be set at approximately 40% of the state median income (SMI) with a high parent co-payment. The committee called on the Governor to add resources in order to raise the levels to 60% of SMI with a smaller co-payment. The Governor's budget proposal in early March of 1997 offered a compromise between the two: the subsidy program would be income-based up to 40% of SMI, but those who came into the program from welfare would be allowed to remain in the program until their income reached 60% of SMI or after two years, whichever came first.

Advocates were not satisfied and continued to push to raise the eligibility level so that more working poor families could get child care subsidies. They stressed that *fairness* dictates that child care subsidies should be available to

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all low-income families, regardless of welfare status. Parents in need of subsidies who would not be eligible under the Governor's proposal were very vocal. Media coverage of the advocates' position was extensive, largely due to advocates' long-established relationships with reporters on these issues.

When the advocates' bill stalled in the Senate, the coalition called on established relationships with relevant committee chairs to move it along. The final version allowed the department to set subsidy eligibility levels at 50% of SMI and included a new market rate survey regarded by advocates as a first step toward higher rates. Legislators of both parties in both chambers supported full funding of the bill through the addition of $100 million in new general fund monies.

Advocates in Illinois were successful for several reasons. First, their established relationships with state agency staff allowed them to coordinate efforts. The leadership of child care administrators on the inside was critical to success, especially in the early stages of the effort, as was the vocal and active support of advocates and parents on the outside. The relationships that advocates had developed with elected officials in leadership positions also proved to be beneficial.

Second, Illinois advocates report that messages linking work to child care and articulating a fairness argument on behalf of low-income working families influenced elected officials in both parties to take strong leadership on the universal access bill. Advance preparation of the media meant that educated reporters asked the right questions and were prepared to write stories with clear messages that supported the strongest points of advocates.

Finally, the political climate offered opportunities for advocates to seize. Pressure to implement welfare reform quickly and successfully led state officials to increase their reliance on the advocacy community. Further, the efforts of Governor Edgar to consolidate social services into a single agency helped. With the impending merger of child care programs for welfare families and working families, advocates took advantage of policy makers' difficulties in making distinctions between the two populations to advocate for universal access to subsidies for both.

Public Campaigns: California

California is the best example in the United States of government by initiative. Since 1911, initiatives on issues ranging from capping local revenues for schools to abolishing affirmative action in the state university system have been decided by voters in the state. Proposition 10 was the first California initiative to propose a new funding stream for improving services to young children.

The success of Proposition 10 is the result of the vision and tenacity of one Hollywood celebrity and the effective efforts and networks of advocates, including the child advocacy community. Rob Reiner had educated himself about the critical nature of the early years and often expressed his frustration that not enough was happening to assure the healthy development of young children. In late 1997, he drafted Proposition 10 to address that need.

The initiative proposed an added sales tax on cigarettes, estimated to raise $750 million per year in new revenues. The new funds would go to California counties and would be earmarked for improving and expanding services for young children and their families, smoking cessation programs, health programs and parent education.

Supporters for Proposition 10 came from a variety of sectors. ECE providers across the state distributed materials and persuaded voters. The American Cancer Society was active. Volunteers from the grassroots statewide advocacy network and some paid workers scoured communities to get the 400,000 signatures needed to get the initiative on the ballot. Funding for the campaign came from targeted appeals to higher-income individuals, especially Hollywood celebrities. Proposition 10 proponents raised $9 million (compared to $30 million raised by opposition forces).

There were several arguments against Proposition 10. Some criticized it as a regressive tax; others said that the traditional legislative route should have been pursued. Others argued that any tobacco revenue should be invested only in health related programs. Many held the view that the initiative would establish a new bureaucracy outside the existing state ECE system that would increase fragmentation problems. Some within the ECE community argued that the new revenues should be spent only for child care subsidies rather than for the coordination and integration of services. In a final push, when polls showed they were losing, tobacco interests paid a former state school superintendent to appear in a series of televised ads to assert that the spending would do nothing for the schools.

To what do the advocates attribute eventual success? Broadly speaking, advocates believe that the combination of their grassroots strength along with the resources, visibility and connections of a figure like Rob Reiner was a good marriage and produced a favorable result. In this two pronged strategy, one would not have necessarily been successful without the other. By election day, both sides had developed a great deal of respect for the other.

Advocates also believe that the political context for the initiative was favorable. For many decades anti-smoking advocates actively worked against the tobacco industry's intrests. Proposition 10 built on those efforts and offered common ground for anti-tobacco and child advocates.

To strengthen public support, Reiner purchased the services of a top flight media firm. One of their most successful televised ads featured former Surgeon General Edward Everett Koop urging support for the initiative.

In addition, advocates who campaigned for the referendum believe that their decision to take advantage of the political opportunity presented by Reiner's initiative was key. Some ECE advocates made the mistake of not joining the effort. Supporters are pragmatic; they believe that while advocates must set their own agenda, they must also assess an effort's potential to successfully help children. If it shows potential, advocates should join the effort to make the outcome the best that it can be.

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Insider Strategy: Oklahoma

Oklahoma's ECE system today features many strong new elements that ensure quality and increase access to ECE programs. The elements include improvements in the preschool program, changes in the child care subsidy reimbursement rate structure, an increase in the size of the monitoring staff, and the creation of a new program for very young low-income children. Much of the credit goes to committed Oklahoma state agency staff and their determination to improve the lives of low-income families. The fact that state child care agency staff played a leadership role in making these improvements suggests that progress will continue.

Oklahoma advocates both inside and outside of the state agency identify four areas of progress in the state's ECE system since 1997. The preschool program expansion, effective August 1998, involved legislative action and is the only one of the developments which is in statute. The preschool program is administered by and largely located in the schools. Before 1997, the average rate for the state education aid formula for a preschool child was very low compared to the rate for a child in kindergarten ($1,180 compared to $3,066), thereby creating an incentive for schools to put four-year-olds into kindergarten rather than preschool programs. In order to correct this, lawmakers chose to use general fund monies to increase the preschool state aid rate to $1770 (part-day) and $3066 (full-day) and prohibit kindergarten attendance by four-year-olds. Preschool enrollment doubled in a single year to 16,000. (In 1999, the program became universal.)

Two significant improvements to the state's child care subsidy program were also made. Oklahoma had never had a waiting list for their child care subsidy program because there were strong disincentives for participation. Co-payment rates were high and the income eligibility ceiling was low. Under the new policy, the eligibility level was raised to 185% of the federal poverty level, the co-payment was reduced to 10% of family income, and the additional co-payment amount for those families with more than one child in child care was greatly reduced. These improvements required new investments of $8.8 million in FY1998, $7.1 million in FY1999 and $11 million in FY2000.

A strong commitment to promoting quality care led to the second improvement in the subsidy program—the creation of a tiered reimbursement rate system for the child care subsidy program in which more training for practitioners now leads to a higher reimbursement rate. The reimbursement rate changes will require a $1 million increase in FY1999 funding and is projected to cost an additional $4.5 million more each year for FY2000 and FY2001. The new funding for both improvements comes from TANF funds that have been transferred into the child care subsidy program.

The third development addresses quality more directly. When state agency staff learned that they could not fulfill the state policy that licensed sites be visited three times per year with current staffing levels, they recommended an increase in monitoring staff. As a result, the number of child care monitors was expanded by more than 30%. The Oklahoma child care agency now has a staff of 130 monitors, with an increase of $1.2 million for FY1999, through funding transferred from TANF.

Finally, with the assistance of state agency staff, a group of lawmakers familiar with Head Start and impressed by the early brain development research, spearheaded an effort to establish First Start. First Start is a new high quality program for children ages 0-3 that requires programs to meet Head Start Performance Standards or National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) standards. Also funded with transferred TANF dollars, the First Start program served 191 children statewide in its first year of operation.

What accounts for the success of Oklahoma's efforts? The improvements were largely initiated by state agency staff working closely with others within the agency or elected officials to make change. Second, advocates on the outside played an important role by educating legislators and pressuring them to make improvements. From the perspective of agency staff and legislators, the most persuasive arguments were those that illustrated the reality of low-income families' budgets or were based on early brain

development and/or school readiness research. Also cited as a particularly effective strategy was taking agency staff and elected officials on "field trips" to low-income neighborhoods, child care centers and schools.

Following Through to Make It Work: New York

In the early days of the 1997 legislative session, New York Assembly Speaker Shel Silver proposed an education initiative, known as *Ladder*, in response to Governor Pataki's proposal to reduce local school taxes. The *Ladder* initiative included funding for five education components: the expansion of full-day kindergarten, the creation of a universal prekindergarten program, the hiring of additional teachers to reduce class size, and additional funding for school facilities improvement and new technology. The legislation emphasized the needs of working families. This analysis will focus on the prekindergarten program.

The unequivocal support of Speaker Silver was a significant factor in the adoption of New York's universal prekindergarten program. The program is administered by the State Department of Education through local school districts and funds only part-day services. As the program is phased in, districts serving a greater proportion of disadvantaged children will be given priority for funding. Criteria in the legislation established district eligibility; districts then had to apply. Local prekindergarten boards were required to be established to encourage participation, recommend to school boards plans for the district and identify interested community agencies. In addition, school districts were required to spend at least 10% of the funding through community ECE programs and to hold one public hearing.

While Speaker Silver was the primary force behind the adoption of the universal prekindergarten program, the force behind its successful implementation was the state advocacy community. As one advocate put it, implementation was, on the whole, "all about leadership in the advocacy community." Actively involved were the nonprofit human services community, child care advocates, the Jewish philanthropic sector, multi-issue child advocacy organizations, trade associations and labor.

As with any new program, important goals for implementation were to get the program up and running and to spend as much of the first year funding as possible. This spending is critical to demonstrate to policy makers that there is sufficient interest and need to warrant future appropriations.

With no money budgeted for planning or preparation, the role of the state education agency was necessarily limited until the program was operational in September 1998.

There were three significant barriers blocking school districts from applying to participate in the program. First, the process required that schools and community ECE programs work together to meet the 10% requirement, something most of them had not done in the past. Both also had to work with the local prekindergarten boards that the legislation established. Second, many schools had to become involved in blending funding streams to enable their programs to offer full day "wrap around" services to meet the needs of working families since the prekindergarten funding only covered a half day program. Third, schools and community ECE programs had no assurance that the state funding could be relied on in the future. Indeed, in his recommended FY2000 budget, Gov. Pataki put forward an approach that would mean less funding for the program.

In the 16 months between the passage and implementation of the prekindergarten program, the advocacy community pulled together. They recruited opinion leaders to persuade key individuals to work with them. For example, two members of the state board of regents were enlisted to encourage outreach to and participation by community ECE providers. Knowing the city's success would influence the rest of the state, the ECE community in New York City rallied to ensure that their program would be successfully implemented. Many advocates reached out to smaller districts to enlist their support and help them craft proposals. Members of the ECE community activated local networks to encourage people to get onto the local boards. Community ECE programs approached school districts to propose ways in which they could work together. One advocacy group published two reports that provided technical assistance to school districts to help them create proposals and educate them about blending funding from other sources so they could offer "wrap around" services.

To advise the implementation phase, the state education agency appointed an external work group that included individuals representing a broad array of human services, child and family policy and education interests. Through regular meetings, individuals who had previously not worked together began to identify the prekindergarten program as a shared interest and coordinate their efforts to promote the program.

An analysis of the first year shows that implementation was a success. Approximately $60 million of the original $67 million that had been appropriated was spent, and 40% of the funding went to nonprofit community-based organizations and individual child care providers. The projected maximum attendance was 20,000 children; the new prekindergarten programs enrolled 19,000 by the first day of school in September 1998.

To what can these successes be attributed? The hard work of advocates and the extent of their collaboration across fields must be first on the list. The opportunities presented by the local boards and the regular meetings of the external work group were seized by advocates as an avenue through which to develop a common cause with new partners.

Second, the ground had been prepared. Many policy makers were committed to the importance of school readiness and eager to benefit from reaching younger children with quality programs. Also, legislators and educators were aware that other states had recently enacted preschool legislation, and they did not want New York to fall behind.

Third, leadership emerged from the ECE networks in the public schools. The state had already had a prekindergarten program in some schools for many years and a strong early childhood network had developed. Information passed quickly through these channels and enabled advocates to take effective action in a timely manner.

Finally, the statutory requirement to collaborate created an incentive for community ECE programs to become involved in the implementation. An additional beneficial outcome of the language is that, although school district officials often diverted more than the required 10% for pragmatic reasons, the increased participation of community ECE programs gave parents more options and enhances the likelihood that a child will be placed in an appropriate program.

Conclusion

Some state level advocates have had notable achievements in increasing funding for ECE programs in the last few years. This paper has briefly discussed achievements in five states

with a focus on the strategies that were successful. Several themes emerged consistently across the five states.

First, to achieve success in each of the states, advocates intentionally built relationships to enhance power both inside and outside state government. In Illinois and Oklahoma, agency staff played central roles. In these states, they were willing and educated partners who assumed leadership roles and made efforts to influence individuals in high positions. In some cases, agency staff coordinated their efforts with advocates on the outside of government; in others, advocates pressured agency staff by sharing information that demonstrated the plight of low-income families and their children.

Building relationships outside government by convening and sustaining coalitions and creating vertical alliances with existing grassroots networks helped advocates in four states. In California, community groups were mobilized to support Proposition 10. In Florida and Illinois, parents were empowered to act on behalf of programs they needed. In New York, advocates were able to energize communities by connecting with pre-existing networks and developing new ones.

In two states, advocates were successful through bringing in influential partners. In Florida, the involvement of business leaders was increased by the creation of a state level advisory board. The increased visibility of individuals representing such a powerful constituency persuaded elected officials to increase ECE funding. In California, Rob Reiner's high profile and extensive resources undoubtedly attracted the attention of voters and contributed greatly to the success of Proposition 10. In both states, the advocacy community was behind the new partners—guiding, supporting and lending credibility.

Second, in each of the five states there was an existing advocacy infrastructure that had developed over time. In California, trust had developed between community organizations and the advocacy community, resulting in active community support for Proposition 10. In Oklahoma and Illinois, the trust which allowed cooperation between the advocacy community and the state agency staff had also been developed over many years of working together.

In addition, sheer time had given advocacy organizations opportunities to develop organizational capacity to analyze policy and produce useful, meaningful materials. The Illinois advocacy coalition report, *Thriving Children, Striving Families*, came out of experience with state policies and programs over a long period of time and served as a foundation of advocacy efforts and an important tool to educate elected officials. In Florida, the resource and referral agency staff had had many years of direct contact with parents, and the subsidy system provided advocates with important information and lent credibility to their positions.

Duration of involvement with child care issues also offered opportunities to develop credibility in the eyes of opinion leaders and the media. Illinois and Florida advocates built on a foundation they had already established with the media as they campaigned for improved state child care subsidy systems.

Third, through their work with the media, advocates have come to understand the importance of effective messages and message targeting. While a more academic approach to educating constituencies was common in the past, advocates today carefully craft and select messages for their power and appropriateness. In two states, Illinois and Florida, linking work and child care proved effective. In Florida, involving the business community on ECE issues reinforced messages that connected

investments in child care to access to work. In Illinois, the rationale that the working poor should have equal access to child care subsidies was very effective. Stressing a message of fairness in Illinois bolstered advocates' efforts, the perception that existing policies were unfairly favoring the welfare population over the working poor appealed to elected officials from both parties and led to success. In California, New York and Oklahoma, messages demonstrating the critical nature of early brain development were powerful persuaders for improving quality through additional investments. In addition, in New York and Oklahoma, the importance of intervening in the earlier years to promote school success was a particularly effective message for educators and elected officials.

Finally, successful advocates seized political opportunities. While advocates must set their own agendas, they must always be alert and ready to take advantage of emerging possibilities presented by the political climate. In three states, Florida, Illinois and Oklahoma, welfare reform debates created such a climate. With the focus on work, advocates linked economic self sufficiency to child care, and came up as winners. With a short time frame for implementation of new welfare reform programs, state government relied on advocates' expertise in Illinois and Florida, resulting in gains for advocates. The state agency work groups formed in New York and Illinois gave opportunities for advocates to build networks and broaden constituencies (in New York) and to target agenda supporting information to decision makers (in Illinois).

Events can also present opportunities. In Illinois, advocates took advantage of the momentum for the Governor's plan to consolidate state agencies as they sought to merge the interests of all low-income families in child care subsidies. California advocates seized the opportunity presented by Proposition 10 after determining that it had a good chance of success. New York advocates used the requirement that each school district must invest at least 10% of prekindergarten funding into community programs as an incentive for programs to get local systems on board.

Finally, the dwindling welfare rolls have led to TANF surpluses in almost every state. Oklahoma advocates jumped at the opportunity to have some of the surplus transferred to child care programs for quality improvements.

We would profit from looking more extensively at strategies that have been successful in increasing funding for ECE programs. In this brief analysis, four successful advocacy strategies from five states have been identified: building relationships with individuals in power, building on the existing infrastructure, educating using effective messages, and taking advantage of political opportunities.

Although the exact figure is in dispute, we know that if we are ever to have the kind of ECE system that our children need and our families deserve, a huge national investment is needed. Winning a campaign for this investment will require broad commitment and the dedication of many skilled state-level advocates. But before we kick off such an effort, we need greater analysis and understanding of strategic elements that have already been tested and proven to be successful.

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ENDNOTES

1. The term *early care and education* refers to a range of services for children ages 0-5, including Head Start, center-based and family child care, and preschool or prekindergarten.
2. For the purposes of this paper, the term *advocate* will refer to individuals speaking out for increased funding for ECE, whether they are business leaders, state agency staff, service providers or multi-issue child advocates.

3

Funding Early Care and Education: *An Assessment of Public Support*

BY Ethel Klein

The public debate about the value of ECE has come further than one might think, but not as far as we would like. At the beginning of the political effort to establish quality ECE, the public was opposed to women with young children entering the paid workforce. Cold War rhetoric still dominated public policy debates and any proposed government aid that included child care was viewed as a sure road to socialism. Family issues were deemed private and government intervention was unacceptable.

Today, a majority of Americans think that ECE does more good than harm. The President of the United States has championed the issue in two State of the Union speeches. And fifty pieces of federal ECE-related legislation were introduced in 1998. From Senate Bill 19, "Working Families Child Care Act of 1997," to House Resolution 131, "Zero to Three Resolution for Early Childhood Development" a broad range of policies addressing these issues has made it to the political agenda.

On the political front, child advocates have also managed to expand the conversation of what we mean by ECE. Politicians now know the importance of quality ECE, because "new" findings illustrate that it is intricately linked to brain development from ages zero to five (some say three). Much learning takes place after the age of five, but the brain structure - which provides for later learning to take place - is set, to a remarkable degree, within the first five years. During this period, neural connections are formed (and also killed). What is learned early is, to a large extent, learned permanently (including the desire and the capacity to learn).

Nevertheless, many children are in poor quality ECE. Access and affordability are key problems that have yet to be solved. Fundamentally, ECE is still viewed as a private issue. We are willing to subsidize some poor women, but – unlike our view of the educational system – we fail to see a need for a comprehensive public investment in ECE.

As the issue of funding ECE entered the agenda in the mid-nineties, opinion research on how to frame the issue or how to assess public support explored three basic themes:

- **ECE is good for children**
- **ECE is good for working parents**
- **ECE is a critical part of connecting with the workforce**

This research provides insights into how to position the issue for elected officials. What we still need to do is determine how to get the American public to see caring for young children as a social good rather than a private responsibility. This is the challenge facing most efforts to gain a political constituency for the needs of children. A review of what we have learned from existing research provides some insights on how we might try to reframe the debate and increase the public's recognition that ECE is good for society.

ECE Is Good For Children

If you ask Americans to talk about the importance of children, they will tell you that "children are our most important resource." This concern is more rhetorical than substantive. Funding programs to help children are not on their radar screen. Most Americans do not see this as an area for investing government funds.

To illustrate this point one need only look at the public's response to the State of the Union address. The media coverage prior to the speech focused on child care (the term used in most polls) and Social Security as two of the President's biggest concerns. Four days prior to the speech, the Gallup organization conducted a poll for CNN and USA Today on how voters would spend the surplus. They found 18% of Americans thought the federal budget surplus should be used to fund Social Security specifically or senior citizens in general compared to one% saying the money should be spent on programs for children.

The President made an impassioned speech for keeping Social Security solvent, helping families take care of their children, preserving the environment, and other social needs. After the State of the Union address, Gallup conducted another poll. Support for spending on social security and the elderly jumped from 18% to 25% while spending for children remained unchanged at one percent.

While Americans say that children should be a high priority, they are not prepared to fund those programs that we believe can make a difference. In 1996 the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation commissioned a series of groundbreaking focus groups that help us understand that "Kids Don't Count" and why that is the case.[1] This research reveals three basic reasons for why the public does not fund programs for children. The first is, "I am but the other guy isn't." The second is, "Child care is not that big a problem." The third is, "Having children is a choice, people should take responsibility for their own children." These responses provide the rationale for limiting the amount of public resources voters are willing to expend on child care for all children, independent of the funding mechanism.

Blaming the other guy

Focus group participants consistently bemoan the state of parenting and emphasize the importance of children. The Pew/Kauffman focus groups found that participants believed children should be the top priority, because they are the next generation – those to whom we "will pass the torch." Nothing is being done for children in this county because other people do not care. Most felt that few Americans really place a top priority on children. They believe society as a whole, their own communities, and other families do not place the wellbeing of children high enough on their list of priorities.

Public Agenda finds that most Americans do not believe children are a priority for parents. Their criticism of parents is coupled with a surprising dislike for children. They characterize young children aged 5-12 as "lacking discipline" and "spoiled." Children

frighten a substantial number of adults today. Only 37% of adults believe that today's children, once grown, will make this country better.[2] These findings do not encourage one to campaign for ECE on the idea that "kids are our precious resources."

It is not that big a problem

Focus groups conducted for Pew/Kauffman point to a sense that child care is not a big problem. Participants whose children were in child care do not place it in their top tier of concerns and usually ranked it in the middle to lower tiers. For other voters, it is not even on their radar screen. They do not want to help people who can afford to provide care for their own children. They also believe families can solve the child care problem without government aid. These voters believe that there are other more intractable problems such as lack of health care or elder care that may require government assistance.

Opinion polls reinforce this finding. In 1997 *Newsweek* reported that only 30% of parents with children under three reported that finding good child care was a problem (69% said it was not a problem). They also found that almost seven out of ten (68%) parents of young children report that they were able to get time off from work to tend to a sick child or other family responsibilities.[3] That same year, the Pew Charitable Trusts released a report showing more than half (56%) of mothers with children under 18 did not believe that finding someone to look after their child was a problem.[4]

This "absence of a problem," seemed to help explain the lack of saliency of child care as an electoral issue. The Coalition for America's Children conducted a comprehensive study of the role of children's issues in the 1996 elections. They found that children's issues were important but that child care was not a salient part of what people saw as children's issues. When asked what the single most important action respondents would like to see the President and Congress take to address the problems facing children, only two% volunteered day care while 33% volunteered education and 18% chose crime and drugs.

Even when it came to balancing work and family needs, unpaid leave was deemed more important than expanding funding for preschool programs. One in two voters (50%) said requiring employers to give their employees several days of unpaid leave to take care of family responsibilities like taking their child to the doctor or attending parent-teacher conferences was very important to them. Nearly half (47%) said they would strongly favor legislation to implement this. In contrast, only 29% said expanding funding to provide quality optional preschool programs for three and four year olds in our public schools was personally important, and only 33% were likely to strongly favor such legislation.[5]

One of the most important findings of the Pew/Kauffman focus groups was the revelation that most parents felt there are few negative, societal consequences resulting from bad child care. They do see grave consequences resulting from poor education. They did not see the connection between the two.

Public opinion researchers are discussing ways in which to focus on ECE as a means of making that connection more real. It is hoped that this connection will increase the saliency of ECE.[6] Efforts to make this connection are quite preliminary and suggest a possibility for change. But the change is not as great as one would have expected.

Parents certainly do not have as much awareness of the emotional and cognitive developmental needs as they do of the child's

physical development. Zero to Three' has commissioned extensive opinion research on parent's awareness of early childhood development. They found that parents know that besides love, babies need more stimulation and a sense of security. But most parents do not understand the significance of early childhood. In terms of intellectual development, parents described this as a process of absorbing information rather than a process of creating greater capacities and cognitive abilities.

The Benton Foundation and the Human Services Policy Center conducted two focus groups to determine if learning this information leads to greater support for ECE. The answer is a very tentative yes BUT. Yes - learning the significance of early childhood development leads people to be more concerned about the early years, but their answer is to educate parents rather than increase support for ECE. Efforts to make the connection between education and early care met with resistance. The Caucasian group was not persuaded that this was a strong enough reason to provide public financing for ECE. They believed it was the responsibility of businesses. And they were even less willing to pay for all children.

Surveys that compare the priority Americans place on child care versus ECE do not show a substantial difference in responses to these two terms. A poll commissioned by the Ad Council in 1998 found that 34% of people polled said ECE is extremely important to them personally and 30% said child care was extremely important.

One of the key lessons I have learned from my own research in this field may shed some light on this view. Parents, independent of how old their children are, get defensive when talking about how we ought to raise children. There seems to be some long-term reservoir of fear that they will be told they were not or are not good parents. Many focus group respondents feel that current discussion of ECE, especially when framed in the context of child development, questions how good a job they did raising their children.

It is often critical to change the context of a conversation before you ask the public to reconsider the role of government in people's lives. One way is to highlight how much the world has changed in such a short time. We are now part of global economy that demands a very different workforce. The tools for learning involve computers, virtual reality, and multimedia, integrative systems that leave most adults baffled. How can they help their children develop the capacity to live in this complex future where people will have jobs that require an ability to process complicated information? Perhaps we can use this context for explaining why we need to approach certain issues, especially that of ECE, in a new way.

Some recent polls commissioned by the Child Care Action Campaign (CCAC) and the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) suggest a change in public priorities. They report that over half of Americans believe it is very difficult to find affordable, high quality child care. Half of the in need of child care say the lack of acceptable child care reduced their or their spouse's or partner's ability to do their job well. Almost half (43%) say the lack of acceptable care prevented them from taking a job they wanted.

These findings describe a very different environment. If accurate, we should expect to see a shift in public support for child care funding in the future. However, there is a strong possibility that the response is inflated by the nature of the question. In general, people are asked if a particular behavior is very, somewhat, a little or not difficult. In each case, the respondents were asked if finding affordable child care was extremely, very, somewhat, not

too, or not at all difficult. This wording tends to encourage people to use the ends of the spectrum. It may be that "extremely difficult" is equivalent to "very difficult" while "very difficult" is equivalent to "somewhat" in other polling questions. If so, these recent findings do not represent as new an environment as it is hoped."

Government programs are not the answer

There is a surprising hesitancy and resistance toward public support for universal child care because Americans still view child rearing as an individual's responsibility. Parents, not government, raise children. Perhaps that is why the same Harris poll that found parents have great difficulty in finding affordable, quality child care also found that most people believe it was the parents responsibility (60%) much more than the government's (15%) to take care of that problem.

When Americans think about the problems kids face, they place a significant portion of the blame on bad parenting. And, generally, they think bad parenting runs across race and class lines. Public Agenda conducted focus group discussions and a national survey to determine public attitudes toward the next generation. They found that one of the consistent public concerns is that many parents are not actually parenting (i.e. not giving proper supervision and guidance to their children). Note that 37 states have passed laws holding parents accountable for their children's actions.

Government programs are not seen as a to get parents to do their jobs. Very few Caucasian parents (27%) cited a shortage of government programs on behalf of kids as a very serious problem. Although minorities tend to favor government programs significantly more than Caucasians, it is noteworthy that less than half of African American parents (47%) and about a third of Latino parents (36%) felt the shortage of government programs on behalf of kids was a very serious problem.

Moreover, when it came specifically to funding for child care and health care programs as an effective way to help kids, there was no groundswell of support among African American parents (56% felt this would be a very effective approach to help kids) or Latinos parents (45% favored this funding). A minority of Caucasian parents (36%) felt these programs would help improve life for children. Support for these programs among Caucasian parents declined as income rose.[9]

Part of the answer for this lack of support for child care, especially among Caucasians, is that it is not necessarily seen as a social good. While few Americans believe that women should return to their traditional roles in society (73% disagree with the assertion they should), the public is concerned that too many children are being raised in day care centers these days. Three out of four (74%) adults agreed with this statement – 39% strongly agreed.[10]

People's current insistence that ECE is primarily a private rather than public responsibility is a challenging but not insurmountable problem. Many things that we now view as public responsibilities were once seen as private obligations. Most of us forget that education was once a private matter. A review of some of the debate that helped the public and elites make that transition from family, home-based schooling to public education will give us some insights into how we can do the same for ECE.

ECE Is Good For Working Parents

Americans are more concerned with government efforts to help adults than they are

with programs for children. When the issue is framed in terms of this perspective, we find support for helping families with children (read helping parents). This year, just before the State of the Union address, the Pew Research Center found that the public gave priority billing to improving the educational system (74%), taking steps to make the Social Security System financially sound (71%) and reducing crime (70%). Dealing with problems of families with children was in the mix. It rated 6th (58% gave it top priority), above some policies which one might have mistakenly thought had more public support, such as reducing federal taxes on the middle class (52%), paying off the national debt (42%) or reforming the campaign finance system (29%).[11]

The priorities Pew found for this year mirror what they found last year. In last year's State of the Union address (as in this year's), President Clinton featured making quality child care more available and affordable. After much fanfare, however, efforts to pass federal legislation died on the vine. From various polls taken during this effort to pass access to affordable quality child care, there are some lessons to be learned about how the public wants to proceed in helping parents with children.

Public opinion surveys taken at that time found that among those people who were aware of the legislation discussed during the 1998 State of the Union, 67% supported the proposal. Half (51%) of adults surveyed by the Harris organization and 45% of adults surveyed by Princeton Survey Research Association were aware of the President's proposal to make child care more available and affordable. That translates to somewhere between 30% to 34% of the electorate were in favor of Clinton's proposal at the time of the 1998 State of the Union.

Voters are not enamoured with the idea of public financing. They are more partial to those mechanisms which have limited government involvement and which place the responsibility for child care where they believe it belongs – with parents and with business.

In response to the State of the Union, Republicans raised the importance of providing tax credits to help mothers stay home. A substantial number of Americans would like their government to help parents stay home to care for their child. An NBC/Wall Street Journal poll conducted a month and a half after the State of the Union asked what was the best way to help families with young children.[12] The public divided evenly between the two choices presented. Forty-four percent supported offering substantial tax credits so one parent could stay home and raise the children. Forty-three percent supported providing subsidized child care and universal preschool for all Americans, allowing both parents to work and improve the standard of living for their children.

One of the most often quoted line in focus group discussions of a social policy issue is "the best social policy is a good paying job." The next best thing to a raise is getting money back from the government, which is why tax credits are generally a very popular form of addressing a wide array of social policy. This is particularly true when it comes to child care because families want a lot of discretion in how they decide to take care of their children.

In this context it is not surprising to find that 71% said they would use some of the budget surplus in 1998 to provide tax credits for child care to families with an annual income under $60,000. What is surprising is that this surpassed the number of persons who would have used the money to improve health care (57%).[13] Gallup asked what kind of priority people placed on providing tax credits for child care and found 20% said it should be a top priority and 43% said a high priority while only

5% said it should not be a priority.[14]

Tax credits are also seen as a useful tool to get business to adopt policies that help balance work and family. People would rather see the government help business take on this responsibility than have government do it itself. Most (87%) are very anxious to see medium to large sized companies become more family friendly. There is enormous support for giving tax concessions to business so that they will offer flexible working hours and encourage telecommuting for working parents.

ECE Is Critical To Connecting With The The Work Force

Public opinion polls find that most Americans believe government has a responsibility to help reduce poverty.[15] The programs that people feel have been most constructive in accomplishing this goal are Job Corps and Head Start. Job Corps is designed to help adults develop skills so that they can become productive members of the workforce. Head Start ensures that poor children are cared for in a safe, educational environment so that they can have a chance in life.

When it comes to addressing poverty, the public wants to spend the money on helping children. Polls taken in 1994 already show that 70% of voters were willing to spend more money on programs aimed at poor children than on the working poor (46% willing to increase spending) and on helping mothers on welfare (29% would increase spending). A Time/CNN poll taken that year confirms that 46% of the public felt the government was spending too little on assistance to the poor.[16]

Child care is seen as part of a comprehensive response to reducing poverty. An April 1994 LA Times poll found that 69% of the public supported a comprehensive approach that included job training, guaranteed jobs and subsidized child care which could end up costing over 50 billion dollars over a ten year period. They felt it was worth the price.

Welfare Reform

Child care is seen as central to helping people off welfare. A poll on welfare reform commissioned by the Kellogg Foundation in late 1998 found that people support a range of programs for persons making the transition from welfare to work, placing high value on government assistance for child care.

This positioning is part of why the ECE movement was so successful in obtaining more funding for child care under welfare reform. The four-fold increase from the original budget made sense to the American people. The conservatives were unable to block this legislation, because, while they want middle class mothers to stay home, they believe poor mothers should go to work. The problem with this strategy is that it works against a larger message of why we should support ECE for all children, including those parents can afford it.

Prior to the 1996 national elections, a study sponsored by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Harvard University found that 73% favor changing the welfare reform law to provide more money for job training and day care. Unfortunately, this was not near the top of their list of priorities for government action. When asked to rate a series of proposals in terms of which two they would most like to see the next Congress do something about, balancing the budget (39%) and spending more on public schools (31%) topped the list. Twice as many people as those electing to change the welfare reform law to provide more money for job training and day care (17%) deemed them top priority issues.

Working poor

Support for child care goes beyond welfare reform. Americans are ready to help ease the ECE problems of the working poor as well. The public strongly supports government providing child care assistance to the working poor. In 1996, Yankelovich Partners found that more than half (56%) of Americans believed that providing day care programs for children so that their parents can work should be among the government's highest priorities. In 1998, the Kellogg Foundation found a national consensus (86%) for making child care available to all low income families so that parents can work.[17]

Again, tax breaks seem to be the policy mechanism with a great deal of appeal. A 1998 poll commissioned by CCAC and CDF found 80% of Americans felt that if Congress provides new tax breaks for middle income families, they should provide child care assistance for low income working families.

Conclusion

Right now, the public appears unsympathetic to our assertions that ECE is important to society. They do not believe they have a responsibility to other people's children. Worse still, they do not like parents of young children or their children very much.

There is some public sympathy for parents who are trying to raise their children in a much more complicated world. If the cost of ECE is burdensome on a family, Americans feel we should do *something* to help. They would rather provide incentives for corporations to take the lead in helping families with children, but they also see the value in tax credits. What they are looking for is a way to help families make the best choices they can based on their means. Their definition of what is "best" does not necessarily match the definition of the ECE community.

While Americans are concerned that too many children are raised in child care, they are very happy to have the children of the poor and working poor in ECE settings. They see child care as an integral part of connecting to work and allowing poor people the freedom to move up the economic ladder. They feel good about this contribution, because it is perceived as helping people learn how to help themselves.

For the most part, the data reviewed for this report is based on questions framed by the political debates. As such, it tells us where the public is but does not necessarily help us in determining how to change the conversation to elicit more support of all parents and not just poor parents.

The basic challenge facing advocates of ECE is getting Americans to understand that providing ECE is a social good. That is the key to moving this issue further into the public realm. That door has been opened by the more recent efforts to discuss ECE but, as that work shows, the challenge is not naming the problem. The challenge is getting the public to accept our assertion that government has some responsibility to and for children.

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ENDNOTES

1. The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation commissioned Lake Research to conduct these focus groups. The Report was issued in September 1996.
2. "Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation," Public Agenda conducted a survey of 2000 adults in December 1997. This poll has a margin of error of + or − 2%.
3. Princeton Survey Research Associates conducted this poll for Newsweek in February 1997).
4. Princeton Survey Research Associates conducted this poll for Pew in 1997.
5. "Great Expectations: How American Voters View Children's Issues" p.16. Lake Research, Inc. and The Tarrance Group conducted this poll of 800 voters nationwide. Similarly, an AFL-CIO poll of 725 working women in 1997 asked respondents to rate the importance of a host of issues. Equal pay for equal work topped the list of what was important to them personally (94% saying very important) while child care was at the bottom of the list (33%). Paid family and medical leave was next to last, but 70% of working women said it was very important to them.
6. The Benton Foundation and The Human Services Policy Center at the University of Washington have commissioned two focus groups to test these assertions. The Human Services Policy Center has also compiled a review of existing opinion research on early care and education that is useful to determining the impact of terminology. It should be noted that almost all of the polling questions use the terms child care or early childhood education. Not one of the polls used the expression early care and education.
7. Zero to Three commissioned Belden and Russonello to conduct eight focus groups among parents to explore their knowledge and perceptions of child development in April 1997. This was followed up by a national survey of 1,022 parents of children age 36 months and younger. Peter D. Hart Research conducted that poll in March and April of 1997.
8. CCAC and CDF commissioned Opinion Research Corporation to conduct a poll of 1,103 household between August 20th and 23, 1998. Similar findings using the same question wording are found by Harris in a poll of 1000 adults conducted between January 14th and 18th 1998.
9. "KIDS THESE DAYS: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation," Public Agenda Foundation, 1997, p. 30.
10. Princeton Survey Research Associates conducted this poll of 1,165 Adults in November 1997 for the Pew Charitable Trusts.
11. Princeton Survey Research Associates of 1,200 adults conducted January 14-17. 1999 for the Pew Research Center.
12. NBC/Wall Street Journal poll of 1,000 adults nationwide conducted March, 1998.
13. Princeton Survey Research Associates for Pew Research Center, January 1998.
14. Gallup survey of 1,015 adults conducted 1/6-7/98 for CNN/USA Today.
15. The Pew Research Center has found that 74% of the public believes this is a government responsibility − 34% believe the federal government should be doing this, 27% say it is a responsibility of the states, and 6% say local government should take care of this. About two-thirds (65%) felt government should give high priority to reducing poverty. Results based on 1,726 adults interviewed 9/25-10/31 1997.
16. Study conducted by the Center for the Study of Policy Attitudes.
17. Both the Yankelovich poll and the Kellogg Foundation survey are presented in the summary of existing polling prepared by the Human Services Policy Commission. No further information is provided.

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4

Creating a Climate for Change

BY Deborah Wadsworth

We are living in difficult and contradictory times. The economy is booming; productivity soaring; unemployment is at record lows. Simultaneously, the gap between those who have and those who don't is greater than ever; fundamental institutions are under attack and public mistrust of institutions is at an all time high. Most importantly, the institution of public education is undergoing extraordinary scrutiny, attempted reform, and attacks from many different quarters. As a nation, we are also struggling to define the moral structure/values by which we want to live and raise the next generation.

As Americans reconsider the need to balance and reconnect our commitment to protecting the rights of the individual with the idea of individual responsibility, public policies are being rewritten linking the concept of entitlements with the notion of reciprocity.

In work Public Agenda has conducted on a range of social issues, the public expresses strong feelings about these issues which differ frequently from those of the expert or advocacy community. Public attitudes grow out of how individuals define the problem in the first place, and that too often varies from the expert perspective.

Thus, the challenge for professionals attempting to solve serious public problems or build consensus around solutions is to step back, set aside the professional mind set, lower natural, often necessary, defenses, and listen with an open-mind to what "ordinary" people have to say.

What people have to say about youngsters these days does not paint a pretty picture. In the thousands of interviews Public Agenda conducted on behalf of The Advertising Council two years ago, and repeated just this past winter before the tragic episode in Littleton, Colorado, we were startled by the intensity of the public's negative reactions to American youth – perceptions that have only worsened with time.

To put it bluntly, many Americans are distraught about today's younger generation. Members of the general public – including parents and teachers who spend time with youngsters on a daily basis – look at kids these days with worry and misgivings. Asked what first came to mind when they thought about teenagers, two-thirds (67%) used negative adjectives like "wild," "irresponsible," and "rude."

Many also view young people with palpable

fear – perceiving too many youngsters as dangerous to society... in a literal sense.

Now it's true that teenagers have always been an easy target, and that the high school years have always worried parents most. But as we proceeded with our research, we were disturbed to find adults painting even *younger* children – whom we defined as 5 to 12 years old – in negative terms.

The benchmark study, *Kids These Days,* was conducted two years ago for The Advertising Council as it began 10-year campaign to motivate the general public to go to bat on behalf of the nation's youngsters. It was meant as a baseline study, so public attitudes could be tracked over time. Two months ago, Public Agenda repeated the research, and *Kids These Days '99* was released on May 3, 1999. Sadly, the negative attitudes remain, with even *more* people identifying the number one problem affecting the young as "not learning values like honesty and respect."

Only a handful of adults says it's typical to come across children who are friendly and helpful toward their neighbors... or who treat people with respect. People think today's children are spoiled and that they routinely misbehave. Only 38% of the American public believes today's children, once grown, will make this country a better place.

What's more, the public's diagnosis of what's wrong is at odds with the approach of traditional children's advocates, who maintain that kids are in trouble because of poverty, lack of opportunity, inadequate health care, and insufficient education. The public starts from a different place. To them, kids are in trouble because they lack the ethical and moral values needed to become responsible adults in society. In addition, overwhelming majorities consider these problems widespread across all demographic groups and all income levels.

In short, while most child advocates worry about kids' *physical* health, the public worries about children's *moral* health. The issue for the public is not that they don't care about children, but that they see parents as the real culprits. In fact, it's almost impossible to talk with the public about children without their immediately moving to a conversation about families and parents who are failing to do their job.

People start with the premise that youngsters primarily reflect what they learn at home. Yet few Americans – only one in five – think that parents who are good role models, teaching kids right from wrong, are "very common" in our society. And, by a similar percent age (19%), parents themselves agree.

Half say parents who fail to discipline their kids are very common in our society. Half also complain about parents who think *buying* things for their kids means *caring* for them – we heard similar comments again and again from teachers in focus groups we conducted for a study we recently completed.

Americans say parents are failing to set limits and standards of behavior for their children, that they spend too little time with their kids, and assuage their guilt by buying them gifts. Overall, the public's analysis is that parents are failing in the moral dimension of their job – neglecting to teach their kids the patterns of behavior that are essential for a civilized, reasonable society.

These beliefs are strengthening as time goes by. Over the past two years, the public's focus on parents has sharpened – with irresponsible parenting blamed more for the difficulties kids face than the social or economic pressures that families contend with in today's world.

As a consequence, when people were presented with a list of possible solutions – from more programs and activities after school, like boy

and girl scouts, to more government funding for child care and health care programs – the latter winds up near the bottom of the list. And, interestingly, though people are unhappy with parents, they are not anxious to have other "institutions" replace them. These are findings to bear in mind when struggling to improve ECE.

In mid-March, Public Agenda released still another new study entitled *Playing Their Parts: Parents and Teachers Talk About Parental Involvement* (1999). The definition these two groups bring to this issue is quite different from that enshrined in the National Educational Goals or the agenda of most education reformers, both of which identify participation in governance as a top priority.

Parents and teachers agree in very significant numbers that the most fundamental and indispensable job for parents is raising well-behaved children who want to learn. For both groups, the same basic lessons – respect, effort, self-control – emerge again and again as the essentials that every child must master before academic learning can even begin. Parents and teachers consider parental attention to these core values more important than even such classic staples of parental involvement as attending teacher conferences and helping with homework.

For teachers, the most dispiriting problems they face are not the daunting challenges of teaching poor or abused children or the special difficulties of teaching children from non-English-speaking homes. Instead, teachers say they feel beleaguered by daily distractions from students who are disrespectful, unmotivated, and occasionally veering out of control. Teachers say that far too many parents just aren't doing their job.

Parents argue – convincingly, I think – that it is tougher than ever to be a parent these days. They say it's difficult to counteract societal pressures and messages - to say nothing of protecting kids from exposure to violence and drugs in their communities and their schools. And they are very conflicted about what they see as a fundamental tension between providing love and affection for their children along with discipline and guidance to build self-esteem.

All this attention to parenting as the source of most of the problems is not as mean-spirited as it sounds. For, not surprisingly, the public also acknowledges that it's tougher than ever to be a parent today, which brings one back to the agenda for ECE.

In a series of focus groups Public Agenda conducted in Missouri on behalf of the Ewing Marion Kauffman and Danforth Foundations, we listened to a widely shared sense that child care was much easier in the not-so-distant past, when mothers stayed at home and children played in the neighborhood. Missouri citizens described childhood and child raising today as fast-paced and stressful. They believe that although children have more advantages and opportunities than in the past, they also are exposed to more dangers. Parents often are seen as having no good choices.

Public Agenda conducted this very preliminary qualitative research about a year ago as a precursor to a thorough and probing quantitative national survey. Thus, my comments drawn from these conversations with representative groups of Missouri citizens must be understood for what they are – hypotheses awaiting validation in a national random sample survey.

The focus group discussion unfolded around a few basic questions: how do the public's values and resistances as captured on other issues play out on the specific topic of ECE? And, what

kinds of programs are most likely to meet greatest public support and opposition?

From what we heard, I would caution you to be wary, for this is a very complicated and tricky issue and one where public values are very strong.

In many public policy issues, the public sees clear – and often simplistic – solutions. If rising health care costs are a problem, for example, people may respond with a straightforward solution: cut back on waste and malpractice. They often have not thought through the complexities and are outraged that the country has not already acted on these basic solutions.

When it comes to child care, however, people see the problem in a much more nuanced way. They can articulate the problem clearly but have no obvious solution to offer. Thus, this issue raises lots of anxiety at the individual level. In every group, conversations inevitably began by people invoking their own childhood... lots of nostalgia for a time when families were composed of two parents, with mother at home. This image, by the way, was consistent among African-American and white participants at every economic level. Moreover, all groups spoke of communities which really supported the values that parents themselves were attempting to instill in their children.

There is much to learn in a thoughtful random sample study, particularly about the public's preferred solutions, even before turning to the question of how to build the political will needed to increase public investment in ECE. On the basis of these very preliminary interviews, however, one hypothesis to be tested is that people may be alienated by initiatives that seem oblivious to the value of earlier styles of parenting and will react negatively to leaders/experts who appear to be bypassing the family rather than supporting it.

Given our extensive research on Americans' attitudes toward youngsters, and their insistence that inadequate parenting is at the root of the problem, a public discussion of what ECE ought to include could be a giant step forward in building public consensus around an agenda that starts with the people whom you most want to help.

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ENDNOTES

Remarks are based upon Public Agenda's research conducted over the past decade. Particular references derive from four studies:

Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think about the Next Generation* (New York: Public Agenda, 1997)

Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, *Kids These Days '99* (New York: Public Agenda, 1999)

Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, and Ann Duffet, *Playing Their Parts: Parents and Teachers Talk about Parental Involvement* (New York: Public Agenda, 1999)

John Immerwahr, *Growing Up Fast: Missouri Citizens Discuss Early Childhood – A Focus Group Report from Public Agenda* (New York: Public Agenda, 1998)

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Some photos in this booklet were taken by Barbara Young, Robert Maust and Tracy Smith.

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